

USING PERFORMANCE-BASED CURRICULUM (An Option in Rule 10)



Nebraska Department of Education
July, 1996

USING PERFORMANCE-BASED CURRICULUM

This pamphlet is intended to assist school officials and teachers in providing performance-based curricular opportunities for students. This provision was placed in the January 14, 1996, revision of Rule 10 (*Regulations and Procedures for the Accreditation of Schools*) in order to give schools more flexibility:

- * in providing alternative learning experiences for students with different educational needs, and
- * in meeting the curriculum requirements of Rule 10.007.01A2.

This provision in Rule 10 may facilitate school improvement by encouraging schools to:

- * clearly express what it is they want students to know and to be able to do,
- * establish local standards for academic achievement,
- * focus school improvement activities on improving student performances,
- * help change the way teachers teach and students learn.

REGULATION 10.007.01A3c

The actual text of the regulation states:

007.01A3c Schools may use performance-based curriculum courses as an option in place of any subjects in Section 007.01A2 if they have a written description of the curricula

or course which includes the goals, representative instructional experiences, expected student performance for accomplishment of the goals, and the rationale for allocating instructional units for the course. The written description is approved by the local board of education and is on file in the school. Performance-based curriculum provides learning opportunities for students equivalent to or greater than those through the course(s) under Section 007.01A2, but may take less than the time required in Section 002.10 for determining instructional units.

WHAT ARE PERFORMANCE COURSES?

As used in Rule 10 and this pamphlet, *performance courses are high school courses of study designed or centered around a standard or uniform quality student achievement, student generated product or artifact, or student performance, where academic success is based upon successful performance irrespective of the time spent in study or preparation and where performance, usually pass/fail, is evaluated by pre-determined, public and commonly known criterion standards.* Some examples might be an “A” level performance on one or several research papers in English; an “A” or “B” level performance on a single major research problem and presentation on environmental ecosystems in Biology; an “A” or “B” level major construction project in woodworking; an “A” level project involving investigation, diagnosis, prescription, implementation and evaluation of the solution for a major automotive problem in auto mechanics, etc.



HOW DO THEY DIFFER FROM TRADITIONAL COURSES?

Customarily high school courses have been designed around a

set of standard or uniform learning experiences or learning opportunities (what is done during the actual class time for all students), for a uniform period of time (e.g. fifty minutes a day, five days a week, for a semester), with the acceptance of very different levels of student achievement (e.g. grades of A to F). Customarily, the instructional units generated for the school and the amount of academic credit conferred upon the student have been based upon the amount of time spent studying the subject (see Rule 10.003.05 and 10.002.10). The grade the student received (A to F) often included extraneous variables such as the effort demonstrated by the student, homework assignments completed, and the student’s attendance and/or participation in class. In performance courses, such extraneous variables are generally irrelevant in the conferral of the amount of academic credit or the grade received. Furthermore, rather than uniform classroom experiences, the actual learning experiences or curricular activity of each student may likely be different in subject content as well as in the time engaged, since it will most appropriately be based upon the student’s prior knowledge and skills and the student’s current educational needs. The curricular plan for the students is those experiences necessary to bring them to the point where they are able to perform the task at the established level or standard of performance.

WHAT IS REQUIRED?

A description of the course which includes the course goals, representative instructional experiences, expected student performance for accomplishment of the goals, and the rationale for allocating instructional units for the course. The written course description is approved by the local board of education and is on file in the school.

HOW MIGHT ONE BEGIN TO DEVELOP SUCH COURSES?

Educators generally use one of two methods. The first method is to begin with the district-approved graduate expectations, graduate outcomes, qualities or characteristics; the second method is to begin with the current curricular offerings.

First Method: Beginning with the District-Approved Goals or Outcomes for Graduates



- * look at the desired qualities or characteristics of graduates expressed by the state board of education and/or the local board of education, and then
- * look at various ways in which students might actually be able to demonstrate those desired qualities, or characteristics, and then
- * look at various ways in which teachers could structure learning activities (new curriculum) which are either subject-area specific or integrated inter-disciplinary and which could culminate in those demonstrations of performance-capability or competency.

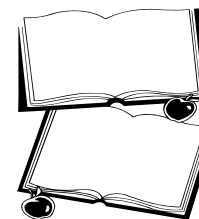
Second Method: Beginning with Current Curricular Offerings

- * look at course descriptors and content and determine how teachers can change the language from students' educational *opportunities* (usually activities) to students' educational *achievements* (usually products or performances), and then
- * look at various ways in which those smaller achievements can be combined so that students might

be able to demonstrate those achievements in some global or comprehensive way in some culminating activity or performance, and then

- * look at various ways in which teachers could structure learning activities (revised curriculum) which are either subject-area specific or integrated inter-disciplinary and which could culminate in those demonstrations of performance-capability or competency.

Conceptually, the first method is generally preferred because the relationship of the students' performances is directly related to the desired qualities, characteristics or outcomes of graduates. However, initially it may be difficult for teachers to develop performances which are as holistic, comprehensive or multi-faceted as those called for by graduate outcomes.



Operationally, the second method may be easier for teachers to develop since it begins with what is more familiar to them, the content of their current courses. However, the second method may result in performances that have little or no direct relationship to the identified graduate outcomes, qualities or characteristics. Thus, while they may be very worthwhile as learning experiences they may be extraneous in relation to district goals. Either method is acceptable for *beginning* the process.

SO I'VE BEGUN, NOW WHAT?

Once the comprehensive performance(s) are determined, they must be analyzed so the evaluative criteria, the acceptable level of student performance and the rubrics for actually evaluating those performances may be developed and established. Since such performances are generally complex

sets of behaviors which are interdisciplinary in nature, development of evaluative criteria and rubrics is best done by interdisciplinary teams of teachers, rather than subject area specialists working alone or together. If this is a schools's first attempt at this type of development, teachers might be well advised to include students and parents at some point in the process. Not only will they serve as another "reality check" on what is asked of students but their inclusion generally will help to make the acceptance of such courses politically more palatable. Ultimately, only training, experience and practice will enable teachers to adequately articulate the criteria, refine the rubrics and reliably evaluate the performances.

HOW MANY INSTRUCTIONAL UNITS TO ASSIGN?

Instructional units are simply measures of time created to insure some rough degree of equivalency in the educational opportunities available to students.

Since performance-courses are product or demonstration-based and not primarily time-based, the school will need to develop a rationale for the amount of instructional units assigned for the course. One way to approach building such a rationale is to say that while the instructional units assigned for the course are not strictly related to the amount of class time or the amount of time any *individual* student is expected to or will need to invest in order to achieve at standard level, the performance requirements are roughly equivalent to the amount of time a hypothetical *average* student would need to expend in order to accomplish the same performance(s) under the current time-based system. In the future, should definitions of performance standards come to be generally accepted, districts will simply be able to report that a student has successfully demonstrated



performances X, Y, or Z, and the transcript will be able to reflect that. In the interim, it would appear that some rough equivalent of time, for many the Carnegie unit and for Nebraskans the instructional unit, will need to be utilized.

HOW DO SCHOOLS REPORT PERFORMANCE COURSES?

At the time of the writing of this pamphlet it is not certain if performance courses will be reported in any special manner to the data center or will simply be listed in the usual manner on the annual curriculum report form. There is some desire to track the various ways schools are utilizing the several new curricular options provided in Rule 10 to determine their usefulness to schools and to see if further creativity may be needed in providing educational opportunities for students. Any special instructions will be provided with the annual curriculum report forms.

For additional information or for answers to questions about other provisions of Rule 10, contact:

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